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Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy. Capacity-Building, Experiential Learning, and Institutional Change by Michael E. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, ISBN 9781316625514); xvi+328pp., £65 hb, £23 pb.

Michael E. Smith's latest book is a remarkably well researched and highly detailed piece of work on EU's development of its security and defence policy. Throughout eight chapters, the book covers the evolution of EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), from its origins to its current (2017) state. After briefly going through the process that led to the creation of CSDP, the first chapter sets the historical institutionalist-based analytical framework – experiential institutional learning. This approach focuses on three main concepts – responsibilities, rules and resources – as measurers of the EU's institutional change in the field. These three concepts are then applied to the different types of mission conducted by the EU: the initial take-over civilian and military missions in the Balkans (chapter 2), the independent military operations undertaken between 2003 and 2009 in Africa (chapter 3), the civilian and monitoring missions (chapter 4), the rule of law and security sector reform missions (chapter 5), and the EU as a maritime actor (chapter 6). The final two chapters are slightly different in scope, offering a more analytical take on the developments in security and defence with the Lisbon Treaty (chapter 7) and on the approval of the 2016 Global Strategy and what that means for CSDP and for CSDP (chapter 8).

Although the book's most immediate aim is to understand whether the EU has been able to learn from its experiences in missions and operations across the world in the last fifteen years, it ends up also addressing a number of extremely important questions regarding the EU as a global actor and of how it is (or is not) capable of balancing its external strategic interests with the needs and demands of its internal integration project. The assessment is sufficiently nuanced to offer both despair and hope. In addition to specific failures and shortcomings of each CSDP mission or set of missions, the book is particularly critical of the Lisbon Treaty as a missed opportunity to innovate institutionally based on "pragmatic operational experiences" (p. 249). Ultimately, the book concludes, CSDP remains limited by the combination of excessive bureaucracy – too many organisations, institutions and committees with a say in the field – and intergovernmental politics, which has kept CSDP under a low profile and subject to ad hoc motivations and resources, incapable of having a significant say in key hotspots around the world, starting with the Middle East in its own neighbourhood.

But for all the frustrations, CSDP has showed some positive results, namely in its missions in Aceh and EUNAVOR in the Gulf of Aden, a capacity to learn from its past experiences (far more than NATO, according to Smith), and the capacity to adopt a de facto comprehensive approach. These are important achievements for what ultimately is "a regional IO" (p. 273).

For obvious reasons, most of the book addresses the period before the EU Global Strategy was adopted in 2016. Its implementation, the developments associated with the Permanent Structured Cooperation in the field of defence, and the UK withdrawal from the EU will mean that there might enough material for an expanded second edition very soon.

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